

POEMS

by
Franco Gavazzi

◀◀ Desio, 1944. Below I have copied out from a very old pocket diary (from 32 or 33 years ago) some verses dedicated to me by my dear mother*.

I would like to have reproduced these few lines as they were written, that is, in her own handwriting; however, since I keep this little diary carefully inside a leather box, my own children will one day find it and will also keep it as a treasure.

One day little Frank was walking
Along a country path:
Suddenly he heard close by
The voice of someone crying

Who was there? Down in the grass, a little frog
Who said: "Oh dear, I cannot find my way
Back to my little house!
How worried my mother must be!

Don't hurt me, oh listen, little boy!"
At this voice that pleaded pity
Little Franco's heart was moved with love,
For he loves animals, and he picked up

The poor little creature from the grass,
Cradling it like a mother.
After a long walk he came to a ditch
Full of slimy, still water:

"Croak, croak", he heard, and the little frog
Answered "Croak, croak", and jumped in his hand.
He had seen his mother, and his little house
Down in the bottom of his dear quagmire.

"Thank you, little boy, for your pity:
He who is kind and gentle with animals
Is also loving to his brothers"

Said the frog, and with regular leaps
Disappeared into the bog: "Croak, croak".
He who has been an obedient little boy
Will grow to be a good man.

Be a strict judge of yourself.
He who knows nought knows much, if he knows
how to be quiet.
Your Mamma is ill, poor thing,
Do you want her to get well soon?
Say a little word to the Lord for her,
Be good and obedient, God will do the rest.

Frank by name
Frank in goodness
Frank in speaking
Frank in your Faith
Frank in will
To become a franc of great value.

Pia Gavazzi Gneccchi Ruscone

Desio, 1911-1912

* The dates are from his diary.

A satirical poem written at the age of 13, after having witnessed an argument between Aunt Mamà, an advocate of militant neutralism, and a certain Maria Rajneri, a cousin of the Chierichetti household, who, on the other hand, was greatly in favour of the war.

The Neutralist and the Interventionist

In the land of Italy
Lives a woman famous
For her neutralism
In case of war:
And this is Ernesta
Of the Counts of Barbiano
Who lives in Brera
Number eighteen, Milano.

In the land of Italy
Lives a woman famous
For her interventionism
In case of war:
And this is Marietta
Of the house of Rajneri,
Who burns with ardent
War-like thoughts.

Terribile rival,
Perpetual foe,
Marietta hurls
Nettlestings,
If poor Ernesta
Calls for peace,
Or rails or protests
Against weapons.

And “peace” cannot
Escape her lips,
Without the interventionist
Flowing over with contempt:
Who, full of anger,
Marietta Rajneri
To Ernesta threatens
The “Carabinieri”.

Who – I must add,
To say the truth –
Returns the insults
With sincere heart:
Shouting and screaming
I saw them just yesterday
The two rivals –
Ernesta and Rajneri.

Which one is right?
The Muse is leaving me,
I have no more to write
But only to conclude:
And to not expose myself
To savage violence,
I leave the difficult verdict
To those who come after me.

Desio, 1911-1912

I wrote these verses one day (so many years ago!) when, after I had brought home some marsh turtles bought from a street vendor, my folks, with their usual foolishness and intolerance, showed the greatest repugnance for the sweet little creatures.

To my turtles

The horror that your grave form arouses,
Unfair horror moved by ignorance,
And that turns away from you all eyes,
In me seems to transform into another horror

Of the narrow, foolish and stupid masses
Who dare to despise in you the work of God.
May this greeting of mine reach you,
You, who are a miracle of the Supreme Mind!

Would that I could wear such virtue
 And such merit in the eyes of the Creator,
 As, with His creating spirit
 He forged you, and there is no more to be said.

Monza, June 3, 1938

A poem written on November 16, 1934, and dedicated to my much-loved parrot Cecca, who, alas, escaped one sad morning from the window and never came back.

Cecca

[Written in Milanese dialect]

Cecca is a gem of a parrot,
 Bad as a viper in the month of August;
 In the Gavazzi household, besides the lad,
 All to some degree find it a great pest –
 Those who tease or play tricks on it
 Risk paying with their fingers.

And Madame Ada well knows this,
 Who, meaning to pay it a compliment
 Received an incipient peck
 Timid and uncertain as a gust of wind.
 By dint of poking with her finger
 She was well and truly bitten.

Yet if she is not bothered or touched,
 If her tail is not pulled and she is not teased,
 Cecca is a delightful parrot,

She is a darling, with all respect;
 She pretends to see nothing,
 But she watches and remembers all.

And from her perch she would seem to say:
 “It is useless to worry yourselves so much
 With talk of money and crisis,
 Noting down all the declines
 Of the market and the debates in parliament,
 To ruin your liver, appetite and mood

For business that goes badly,
 For clients who cheat –
 Be like me, who, sitting on my perch,
 Eating birdseed and chocolate,
 Without worries, torments or cares,
 Lives in bliss, and lasts for two hundred years.”

Desio 1934

This “very romantic” little poem, written not less than 10 years ago, leaves off – as we can see – at the crucial point. The rest was to be even more romantic: Lady Primrose is captured by a ferocious buccaneer and locked up with her servants in a tower; the dove flies away and meets a stalwart young knight who, following the flight and the directions of the clever little animal, discovers the hiding place of the lovely and unfortunate lady, challenges the villain to single combat, defeats him in a duel, and... the rest we can guess, with the additional complication that the knight joins the expedition, and they all go on a pilgrimage to Rome, where the two heroes of the charming little story are married by the august hands of the Holy Father. However, since I do not foresee the possibility of ever finishing this work (my poetic vein having now completely dried up), I have copied it out as it is in my beloved diary, as an example of my familiarity with the English language.

Lady Primrose

Her name was Lady Primrose:
She was as fair as day:
Her eyes did spark like evening stars:
Her cheeks were flowers of May.

A castle old was her abode
That aged oaks did hide,
And through the thickets ran a brook
That lapped the castle's side.

Sweet Lady Primrose sat at eve
Outside her castle door;
There came to ask for alms as many
As in her fief were poor;

And she would hand to each as much
As would fulfil their need;
Then to her chamber she retired
And did her prayers read.

Early in the morn she rose from bed
And did devoutly pray.
Then she would feed her cherished dove
And with it she would play.

Just look at her, as on her wrist
The little pet dove sits,
The lady's soft-caressing hand
Striking with gentle hits.

One day the lady told her nurse
She wished to leave her home,
And for a while go trav'ling forth
And reach eternal Rome.

"A pilgrim's cloak I want to have,
The simplest I can find;
And I shall start this very noon
Lest I should change my mind".

"Nor will my lady leave without
My being at her side"
Returned to her the faithful nurse;
And they set forth to ride.

The steward saddled horses two
Which were – in troth – the best
The lady's stables could afford
Nor wont to idle rest.

Said Lady Primrose: "Nursie dear,
Bring me my cherished dove,
For I'm unable thus to part
From this my sweetest love;

Nay, I shall take the bird with me
And love it as my child:
God would I were to have one thus
As gentle, good and mild!".

Then both they parted, Lady and Nurse,
And one man-servant too
Who was to lead the way, of course,
For he the land well knew.

They crossed a forest vast and dim
Where evil goblins dwelt,
But the three pilgrims' sacred cloaks
Their naughty tricks repelled.

They went through glens and meadow-lanes
They passed one little town;
And at a lonely country-inn
At nightfall they came down.

They ate full well and went to rest,
And slept till dawn of day,
The servant lying by his horse
Upon a pile of hay.

When rosy Dawn came soaring from
The ocean's bosom deep,
And owls flew off to their abode
Ceasing to wail and weep,

When out the gentle mermaids came
In groups to sing and play,
And on the mossy grass the nymphs
Led choirs and dances gay;

Then Lady Primrose from her bed
Arose and called the Nurse:
“One shilling give the host, my dear,
One shilling from my purse;

Then tell the servant to be quick
And get the horses ready”;
And on her saddle once again
She sat full well and steady.

The little dove sat lovingly
Upon the lady’s arm;

But soon began to wail, as if
It guessed impending harm.

The lady tried to check its grief
By whisp’ring at its ear
A thousand tender little words
As if the bird could hear:

But it went on lamenting, till
They reached a gloomy wood;
Then its small head the dove bent down
And sad – though silent – stood...

November 1939

I recall one of the little poems I wrote here many years ago; it is a rather rococo composition, with certain verses that could be beautiful if they were separated from the concepts they express. I am pleased to transcribe them here, all the same, while calling upon the indulgence of any who may read it. The poem is dedicated to the town of Santa Margherita.

Santa Margherita

You sit beside the sea, the immense blue sea,
O charming Santa Margherita
The eye and the spirit quiet and whispering
Of the great crystal that lies before you.

The sun smiles on you, and you reply, beautiful,
Laughing also at the golden rays and the sky;

Neither do you see, chaste virgin,
Young rose on your stem,

Neither do you notice those green mountains
That encircle you like a crown, and looking down
From their high peaks they direct their springs to you,
Eternally singing their love.

Santa Margherita Ligure, 1941

Sonnet to the Moon

Spring moon in the midst of the sky
You adorn, shine with chaste light,
You instil such a chill in the heart of the poet
That it then translates into fire and verses.

You are so beautiful, o Virgin of Delos,
That you cheer and honour the grim darkness;
And you are so sweet in your silvery veil,
That love for you reduces all to lovers.

Yet if night turns toward the storm,
And thunder roars and lightening flashes,
And your brightness vanishes
Among the storm-clouds,

And the sky bellows, and every star dies;
O Virgin Moon, your beauty
And my strength are made two-fold by love.

Milan, 1937

In front of the Duomo of Milan

O spires reaching up to the sky, as
 Hosts of angels praying in stillness,
 Composed in cold marble and all alike,
 My prostrate and deferent spirit

Worships with you the same God.
 You, Virgin Mary dressed in gold,
 Benign and gentle, listen to he who beseeches you,
 And bless my whole life.

Milan, 1937

Charade

[Two rhyming riddles with plays on words based on the words “sentinella” (sentry) and “Zoroastro” (Zoroaster)]

Il primo senti
 Nella seconda:
 L'intero vigila
 E fa la ronda
 (senti-nella)

Nell'alfabeto il primo troverete
 Ed il secondo nel porta-monete;
 Il terzo sì da lunge a noi sfavilla,
 Che, benchè immenso, appare una scintilla
 E l'intero fu un grande dell'Oriente,
 Mago creduto dall'antica gente.
 (Z-oro-astro)

Milan, 1937

Ode to the Dawn

(in its final version)

Now that Dawn with its rosy hue
 Lights the sky,
 And the darkness, vanquished,
 Fades away and slowly vanishes;
 Now that to its hiding-place
 On the bare crag

The solitary night bird returns;
 And the fair

Nymphs on the rocks of their stream
 Dance to their Olympian father
 To the rising sun
 Of the clear East,

Then from sleep I rise, and from my balcony
 I hasten to gaze upon
 The uncertain rays of the god-like star
 Of the beautiful season:

Nature, arouse the day
To rejoicing,

Sing love.
Greetings, O beautiful Sun, and you, sweet April,
That the heart of the poet
May be inspired by the Muse soft and gentle!
To you I sing this ode
Of eternal praise.

So, all alone
At the stage of life,

That my senses intoxicate and inflame my mind,
And invite to rejoice,
My lofty thoughts
Turn to seek that beloved face;

And to hold it tightly in my arms
And kiss it, I think
With a love
Unlimited, immense...
But the sound of life flees
And the vain image retreats.

Milan, 1937

The Nightingale

Among the bushes sings the nightingale,
Softly to the celestial moon it sings,
While its foe the owl takes flight,
And all is quiet in the calm darkness.

And soon a lovely crowd of nymphs gathers
To listen to the bird:
And high in the sky from pole to pole
The stars twinkle one by one.

Trills out the singer its loving lamentations,
And fills the plain with sweetness
And the wood and air with such gentle harmony,

That the heart of the bard is filled with poetry.
All night the song lasts,
And dies with the bursting of the new rays.

Milan, 1937

Ode

I saw a woman far more beautiful
Than the day or the sun,
With sublime speech
And honest word,
She spoke to me, igniting in my heart
Flames of love.

“Oh you, old poet, sad and weary,
You so laden with years, struggling
To hold out, lying painfully on your side,

You who stand at the great divide;
Tremble, poet,
For I am your only destiny.”

A garland of green laurel she gathered,
Shining with eternal radiance,
And she placed it on my head,
And left me, saying:
“For me you will live on in human memory:
I am Glory.”

Milan, 1937

To Parravicino of Brianza

Nest of fairies, of elves and loves,
 Miracle of nature, and king of the hill,
 Parravicino, you steal my heart away,
 With your cool shadows and green swards.

Winding through your fresh grasslands
 Are icy and adamantine streams:
 They are all known to me, and all loved,
 And to my eyes more beautiful than the sea.

Milan, 1937

I am working very hard on a poem in dialect about Via Cappuccio, a kind of “tribute *in extremis*” to this dear old street that, very regretfully, we shall soon have to leave. I have been mulling over the idea for a long time, but the verses come with great difficulty, working their way out of the formless muddle of impressions. It is supposed to be a collection of “sketches”, and I would like to set down in these pages the first samples, in the hope that I will manage one of these not-too-distant days to put down the whole “masterpiece”.

Via Cappuccio

O Via Cappuccio, Milanese neighbourhood,
 One hundred per cent district of old Milan,
 With your gentry and your humble folk
 All of the genuine Milanese stock,

...

There is His Excellency the Marquis Peppino
 The hat-on-the-head of all the people...
 There is Gian Paolo and Mariolina Melzi d’Eril,
 A couple of fine gold:
 Children they have none, but gifts from heaven
 They have enough to light a hundred candles.

...

There are the two Romeis, pillars of the neighbourhood,
 Or Ussi, the barber of the “First Estate”,
 And Andalò, owner of a garage,
 Made especially for those with plenty of time.

...

There are the Martinoli with seventeen children,
 And there is even the blonde on the terrace,
 Who, tooth for tooth, goes about as if she were in heat,
 And so ... beware of her unfaithful eyes !

...

There are the Gavazzis at twenty-one, with three boys,
 There are the Locatellis, and the Gavazzis at eighteen.

...

1940

Desio, 1943. I am about to throw an old notebook of writings, verses and... nonsense from my adolescence and youth into the flames – but before I do so I want to preserve for “posterity” something which, although of little intrinsic value, I would be sorry to see irreparably lost. *In primis*, a “youthful fantasy” entitled “The Jewel at the Bottom of the Sea”, incredible nonsense, I agree, but we all know that one becomes attached to certain parts of one’s own brain, even though they may not be worth the trouble. The parts in prose have been inserted in place of verses that were finally “rejected” as unworthy of appearing among my poetic works.

The Jewel at the Bottom of the Sea

I was a glittering jewel
On the white finger of a lady;
Never was seen or heard of
Another more beautiful.

Said, one day, a wicked youth:
“That jewel I shall swiftly steal
When the noble lady
Closes her eyes to sleep”.

And in the dead of night
The youth came to the lady’s bedside:
He lifted and held her finger...
Then he took me and ran away.

Through the woods and the mountains,
Through the valleys and the plains,
Through the fields and the countryside,
Away ran the wicked youth;

But the remorse that in his heart
Gnawed like a worm
Punished him so with the horror
Of his act, that he died.

A compassionate friar
Who lived in that wood,
After saying a prayer
Buried him quickly;

And I lay underground
In total darkness
Lamenting to myself
My shrouded splendour

And I would have stayed
Forgotten and without honour,

Had not one of the Gnomes
A brave explorer

Discovered me
And brought me as a gift to his King
Who, in speechless wonder
Gazed on me, enthralled.

“Sire, this ring I give you
As your devoted servant”.
“Thank you, my friend, and as a reward
You shall become ‘commendatore’.”

Now, the good king of the Gnomes
Had an angel-like daughter,
So beautiful that her name was
Vermillion Rose.

Princes and dukes and knights
Had all longed to win her;
Great noble warriors
Had jostled for her:

But the fair damsel, increasingly sad, refused
every offer of marriage;

And weeping, “Woe is me!” would cry,
Disconsolate and downhearted,
“For I shall never be loved
By he for whom I pine!”.

For in a dream Vermillion
Had gazed on a jewel,
So bright and shining, that to it
Her love she had sworn.

That treasure, that ring,

That Oriental gem,
That beautiful jewel
Was I myself

And doctors, and physicians
And philosophers, soothsayers,
Professors, wise men,
Fairies, witches, magicians and the like,

Everyone was questioned by the King in order to
find out the cause of the Princess's sadness.

Yet in vain all science
Scoured the universe
For at the end of five years
Nought had yet been revealed.

Then came Rose to the foot of the throne
Just when the father Gnome
Gave me to his King
With ceremonious hand:

She saw me, and suddenly
She cried out and fell to the ground;
That the object of her dream,
Of her one and only love,

There, finally, was the ring, in the hands of the King!

Then quickly came to her aid
Her ladies and all the courtiers:
The good King, in silent amazement
Lifted his hands to Heaven.

But soon Vermillion
Awoke from her stupor;
Now in her eyes burned a fire,
A wonderful light;

Her face was white
As a lily of the valley,
And on her lips a smile
Of intoxicated mystery.

And in the dead of night
She came to her father the King on his throne;
No reasoning could change her mind;
She seized me and ran away.

Five faithful attendants had she for escort
Who at the altar had sworn
That before they saw Rose die
Would die themselves beside her.

Quickly she came to the seashore
And in haste boarded ship,
Clutching always to her fair breast
Her precious burden.

For three days Vermillion Rose
Sailed on the immense sea,
Until, on the fourth, the sky
Became thick with cloud:

Fearful was the storm
That raged around her,
But alone, on deck, the runaway
Gazed blissfully upon it;

With a heavenly smile
Of immense faith:
She cared nothing for death
For her love was with her:

And to Heaven she cried:
"Praise and thanks I give to God":
The wind howled and the sea raged,
And the ship was wrecked!...

I was a glittering jewel
On the slender finger of a lady:
Now, seized by the whirlpool,
I lie sparkling at the bottom of the sea.

Time

What is time? Time is a great pretence
Which, in the eyes of he who gazes on
Its enormity and yearns to touch it,
Quickly tinges itself with a new colour

And appears to him different than before.
Time changes like fortune;

It cannot be trusted,
For that which it brings it quickly takes away

And what is good today becomes evil tomorrow.
Time flies, it flies without resting:
With its passing the rose flourishes and withers,
Hour by hour, with its passing, men also pass...

This could be entitled "Summer Night":

Summer Night

Night approaches: majestically,
With a dark veil nature it shrouds.
Once Pluto's, the gentle bride
Directs her steed along the beaten path;

From within the bushes the nightingale,
Sings softly to the lofty stars,
While the treacherous owl takes flight
And lovely fireflies glow.

All alone I keep vigil in the moonlight
Watching as the nightly scene unfolds,

And in the dark quietness burns a love
And with its brightening brings me great pain.

I think of her, the queen of my heart,
I think of the blessed hours of love,
Until the divine soul of morning
Peeps out from behind the shady shrubs.

Held tightly together in the sweetest love
I think: and the sphere of the moon appears,
The candid steeds turning themselves to the sky,
And to the afflicted soul seems to say "hope".

It is Father's seventieth birthday and it coincides, fortunately, with the continuing improvement in his health. Today we were supposed to have a great party – a grand lunch in Desio with all, or almost all, the family gathered together, a performance by the children with various tributes and speeches, etc., etc. However, it will all have to be postponed until a more appropriate time. In the meantime, here is the little poem that Stefano was supposed to recite, composed – as usual – by the genius of the house, my Margherita.

Giuseppe Gavazzi

Today, as everyone knows,
Is Grandfather's birthday:
Seventy blessed years
Has Heaven given him.

My own age
Is seven, and now I would like

You to tell me
What difference there is.

If you are people
Who are too serious and wise
You will say: "Think, dear,
The difference is immense.

Grandfather is intelligent,
He is clever, skilful,
He is learned, he is a Senator,
He is truly a fine gentleman.

You are just a silly boy,
Little and conceited,
You're only good for playing,
Whining and arguing!"

But I say: "Wait a minute!
Let's write down here
The two numbers above
Seventy and seven.

They are almost the same, aren't they?
Apart from a little zero
Which, everyone knows,
Means precisely – nought

Who, in fact,
Plays and jumps with us,
And makes us run wild
Shouting with glee?

Grandfather himself,
Who to us is almost a brother.
You say he is very serious
But he is very young at heart".

Margherita Gavazzi Majnoni d'Intignano

Desio, March 3, 1947

Poem written by a friend, Beatrice Pelli Roncaldier, in occasion of our Silver wedding anniversary (June 30, 1960).

1935-1960

"She loves me? She loves me not?" sighs Franco,
With Margherita sitting at his side;
"He will not make up his mind!" thinks she,
amazed,
Looking at Franco.
Thus it began, with pounding heart,
Like any other love story.
Franco plays the card of marriage
With his usual "patrimony"
So his bride, calm and beautiful,
May sail confidently the caravel,
And amidst the sails swelled by the wind
Are five little extra sails:
Five pairs of sailing shorts

Acquired along the way!
Today in the sea all silvery
The ship rests for a while:
Twenty-five years! – what joy fills the heart
When the eyes gaze on love!
And do not be afraid you have lost your looks,
For him you will always be "Margherita"
And do not think "I have gone grey",
For her you are always, and only, Franco.
Silver wedding, happy wedding
With five sons and many friends!
And towards the golden wedding, directs
The calm and beautiful bride the caravel.

POEMS

by
Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano

Children's poems written for the children and for family performances

Little Red Riding Hood

W The wolf – Egidio
R.H. Little Red Riding Hood – Stefano
G. Grandmother – Marco
H. The hunter – Gerolamo

I - The wood

R.H. Oh what a lovely swallow-tail, oh what a lovely red admiral! I want to catch it! I want to pick flowers for my Granny. Mamma told me not to linger, but Granny would be so happy with the flowers, and anyway... wolves don't exist.

W (*leaping out*) Grr... grr... gnash...

R.H. Oh dear, oh dear! Don't eat me, Wolf!

W Don't be afraid, Little Red Riding Hood, I am a very good wolf, a saintly wolf, I don't eat little girls, I only eat salad.

Don't believe the stories told by stupid people who don't know any wolves. Do you know what wolves are like? Wolves are exceptional animals, intelligent, spiritual and poetic. Why do they live in the woods? Because they love nature, the birds, the little flowers, the tinkling streams.

We receive inspiration from all these things and we write poems.

R.H. I never knew that.

W I'm sure you didn't – poor wolves; lies, always lies! And now what do you think of me?

R.H. That you are very polite, and it is interesting to listen to you, but now I must be on my way.

W Where are you going?

R.H. To visit my grandmother, who lives in the little white house at the end of the wood.

W Oh, I know her, the dear old lady! This is the way.

R.H. No, no, it's this way, I have always gone this way.

W Then you have been mistaken! This road is much shorter; listen to me, for I know the wood like the backs of my paws.

R.H. Really? Thank you, Mr. Wolf. Goodbye!

W Not "goodbye", but "until we meet again", my dear.

W (*aside*) Ha, ha, ha, what a nice morsel I will soon enjoy!

II - Granny's bedroom

G. I am old, old, old and all alone, no-one comes to visit me, not even the animals of the wood, not even the wolf – I am even too old for him!

W (*offstage*) Knock, knock. May I come in?

G. Who's there?

W Little Red Riding Hood, your loving, devoted grand-daughter.

- G. Oh my dear! Lift the latch and come in.
 W. Growl... gnash... Now I'm going to eat you!
 G. Oh!...
 W. Ha, ha, ha! I had to gobble down this shrivelled toad, but now Little Red Riding Hood will soon be here – Ha, ha, ha!, what a tasty morsel, chocolate and whipped cream!
 R.H. Knock, knock – Granny?
 W. Who's there?
 R.H. It's me, Granny. Little Red Riding Hood.
 W. Oh my dear, my precious darling grand-daughter! Lift the latch and come in.
 Dear little girl, coming to see your old Granny, come here, come close, so I may see you better.
 R.H. Oh, Granny, what big eyes you've got!
 W. All the better to see you with.
 R.H. Oh, Granny, what long arms you've got!
 W. All the better to hug you with.
 R.H. Oh, Granny, what a big mouth you've got!
 W. All the better to eat you with... Snap!
 R.H. (*screams*)
 H. Bang!
Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother jump out.
 R.H. Oh, Granny, I was so afraid!
 G. My dear, think no more about it – the wolf is dead. Let us all dance together under the stars for the liberation of the people**.

S. Maria, 1945

Riddle

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| E. | Stefano, Marco, Girolomino
Let's play, the riddle game. | who takes us out... |
| M. | I don't know how, I'm too little. | M. Ah! I know. |
| S. | I know how, I can help you. | S. Who is it? |
| E. | I'll think first. | M. The Fräulein! |
| M. | No, I'll think.
Don't fight – whoever thinks of one first
May say (without shouting)
"I have one!"
and we will guess. | E. No, you didn't guess right!
This person goes hunting for strange things –
different types of insects, toads, newts
and salamanders, tadpoles, frogs.
A person who loves the animals like people. |
| E. | It's a good idea – let me think.
Ah! I've got a riddle. | S. That's you, the explorer
of ponds and ditches. |
| M. | Is it a man? A woman? Give us a clue. | E. No again;
it is someone of great worth |
| S. | Is he old? Young? Ugly or handsome? | who works in fabrics, and I may say
that this person makes dresses by the hundreds. |
| E. | Slowly, slowly – now I'll give you a clue.
It is someone we love a lot, | M. Ah, it is a dressmaker, it must be Delfina
or Concetta! |

** This was a catchphrase, in 1945 it was used in every occasion.

- E.* No, no!
If you don't think, you won't guess.
It is someone who tells famous stories,
of fairies, ogres, magicians and witches,
of spells, potions, precious stones
and seven-league boots.
- S.* That's Grandfather from Castelnuovo
with his wonderful and endless stories.
- M.* I don't think so –
Grandfather, as far as I know,
is a General, not a dressmaker.

- E.* Well done, Marcuolo; I'll continue.
It is someone who loves us and thinks
we are beautiful,
And if we make a noise, grumbles a little.
- S.* It must be Mamma!
- E.* Oh! What brothers I have!
How can you be so stupid!
Now you'll see who has guessed,
Where's Gerolamo?, here, quickly,
Tell everyone that it is...
- G.* Father!

October 4, 1945, St. Francis

The Painters

- E.* Ladies and gentlemen, pay your respects
To four young artists
- M.* Four promising painters
And very talented portraitists
- S.* Now each one will give proof
Of his own ability
Beginning right away
With his self-portrait
- E.* I am Egidio
I am a nuisance
Very often
To these people
- I am tiresome
And naughty
I make them shout
And then moan.
- But I do have
Some virtues –
I am studious
And meticulous,
- I devour books,
I study amphibians,
I learn about insects
And little animals,
- I observe with care,
I listen to the adults,

I am sensible,
Well-mannered,

A little pedantic
and overbearing,
And I cannot bear
Those who do me wrong.

Here, then,
Are the qualities
And the flaws,
I have told you all.

And now with this
I finish
By saying goodbye
And paying you my respects.

- S.* Here is Stefano, the absent-minded
With his head in the clouds;
“What did you say? What did you do?”
Everything always has to be repeated.

And then, sadly, I have a great flaw –
I whine, and then, sometimes,
If someone teases me
I burst into floods of tears.

Egidio says he studies a lot,
This can't be said of me,
Yet I am self-assured

- And no-one is smarter than me.
- I prefer working
With my strong muscles.
Won't you make the most of
Someone who can help you?
- I can dig, carry,
I am a mechanic, a labourer
But then you must make allowances
If I get into a mess.
- M.* I am Marco the quiet one,
I am Marco the mysterious one,
The others talk a lot
I watch them, I keep quiet, and listen
- And I don't say what I'm thinking.
I have huge, black, sharp eyes,
A cheeky little face
And an impish tuft of hair.
- I look a lot like an urchin,
Like Puck, that little imp.
But are you ready for a surprise?
I am better than I seem.
- I love to be cuddled
And the more I love people
The naughtier I am with them.
Aren't I just a little treasure?
- G.* I am Giromino
The littlest
Very spoilt
And pampered
- I am bossy
With these people
But with you I am
Good and kind.
- M.* Dear folks, don't think
That we are content with this –
Now it is your turn! Listen,
And hear how we will roast you now.
- S.* Uncle Giuseppe is a gourmand,
He loves sweets and good wine,
And his nephews take advantage
Of Uncle "Pone"s' weakness.
- E.* Father is rather totalitarian –
"Don't touch! Don't breathe!"
But he is a wonderful father
Who even lets us shoot
(And goes fishing for newts).
- M.* Uncle Gian Pier doesn't know what to do
With the kids, so he says,
Then he comes himself to look for us
And excites us and amazes us.
- S.* And Mamma? She's always in a hurry –
"Quickly, it's late, we must hurry up!"
Doesn't she realise, poor thing,
How lovely it is not to care?
- M.* Aunt Lulù
E. You're a gem,
S. All in blue
M. Aunt Lulù.
E. Come down
S. No, stay up,
M. Aunt Lulù
E. Do you love
S. More and more
E. Eyes of blue
M. Aunt Lulù?
Our "Miss" is so kind
That discipline suffers a little
- S.* At the sight of Grandfather
The soldier and officer trembled,
But the general is bullied
By his disrespectful grandchildren.
- E.* Granny is quite absent-minded
She finds nothing in its right place
She would even lose her flowers
If they weren't outside in the vase.
- But a Granny so dear and loving

Travel the world and see there are none
 We celebrate her day with joy
 With best wishes and resounding "Hoorays".

S. Giannina is always afraid
 She jumps in the air, poor thing

E. And Antonietta

Is never in a hurry;
 Give her time
 To have a chat!

M. When we want to help Giuseppe
 In the end he has more to do.

S. Maria, 1946

Santa Maria

I want to recite a poem for you
 Dear Granny, Granny of mine:
 A little poem from your grandson
 Is the nicest way to wish you well

And I truly wish
 For all worries to leave you
 About dear Uncle coming home
 Safe and sound

About Auntie soon finding
 The husband she deserves
 And they give me lots of sugared almonds;
 That Peace waits no longer

To put an end to this war,
 That on earth they sign
 The fairest and most holy pacts
 That history has ever known.

1941

Untitled

Cat's eyes
 Green with light
 In the empty darkness
 Surrounding us

The eyes are yours
 Vivid and treacherous
 Reflected light
 Of our nothingness

I want a light
 That is a foothold
 That never goes out
 That holds me up.

I want you!
 Change your nature!
 Though if you change
 You are no longer you.

May 1973 >>

